



# NEWS RELEASE

GOVERNOR'S COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

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## **BREDESEN EXTENDS SAFETY NET TO INCLUDE LOCAL PHARMACIES** DISENROLLED NOW HAVE NEW OPTION FOR FREE GENERIC DRUGS

**Nashville** - Governor Phil Bredesen announced today that Tennesseans losing TennCare coverage have a new option for receiving free generic drugs as a part of Tennessee's expansion of the health care safety net. In an agreement reached with the Tennessee Pharmacists Association and the Tennessee Retail Association, local pharmacies can join the safety net pool to provide free generic drugs to Tennesseans coming off the TennCare program.

"This is another important step in our efforts to strengthen Tennessee's health care safety net for those losing TennCare and for the hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans who have no health insurance," said Bredesen. "While we cannot replace TennCare for those losing coverage, we can - and will - strengthen the public health services in Tennessee to the benefit of all of our citizens."

The agreement allows local pharmacies to join the prescription drug safety net program announced by Governor Bredesen on July 18<sup>th</sup>. The Rx Outreach program provides free generic medicines from a list of over 55 FDA-approved drugs to help treat problems like asthma, high blood pressure and depression. The State will cover the cost of the generics program - approximately \$12 million - through December 31 (or June 30, 2006, for those identified by TennCare as mentally ill). The expansion is expected to be operational by the first week of September. A list of participating pharmacies will be available through the state's Health Options web site at - <http://www.tnhealthoptions.org>

"Local pharmacists play a very important role in health care delivery in Tennessee," said Baeteena Black, executive director of the Tennessee Pharmacists Association. "We are very happy to participate in this program and look forward to working closely with the state and other health care providers to continue strengthening public health services in Tennessee."

"The neighborhood pharmacy is still the primary point of care for thousands of Tennesseans," said Russell Palk, president of the Tennessee Retail Association, which represents all chain drug stores and grocery stores across the state. "Pharmacies have an important role to play in providing services to Tennesseans losing TennCare coverage."

The prescription assistance program announced in July is being provided by the State under an \$11.6 million contract with Express Scripts, a pharmacy benefit management company that also offers two additional services for TennCare disenrollees:

- Express Access Discount Card - Provides savings up to 10% on brand-name prescription medicines and up to 50% on generic medicines purchased at participating pharmacies.
- Additional Prescription Assistance - Provides help getting access to other assistance programs, including those that may be offered by brand-name drug manufacturers.

In addition to these drug programs, the State also is providing \$33 million in direct funding to help mentally ill TennCare disenrollees buy prescriptions at their local pharmacies and drawing down \$8 million in federal funds to help Medicare-eligible individuals until the Medicare drug plan takes effect in January. For information on these or other programs, call the Tennessee Health Options Hotline at 1-888-486-9355, or visit <http://www.tnhealthoptions.org>.

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